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SUBJECT: Refugee Fund Helps Open Multi-ethnic  
Seniors Home

11. SUMMARY AND COMMENT: On December 6, Ambassador commemorated the opening of a US-funded multi-ethnic seniors home in Siroka Rijeka near Cetingrad on the Bosnian border. Operated by the local Islamic community, the home offers daytime activities and services for elderly in the community as well as food delivery to shut-ins and assistance with other basic needs. Clients are ethnic Bosniak, Serb, and Croat, reflecting the area's diversity. Through funds from PRM's Ambassador's Refugee Fund and USAID, Post provided kitchen equipment and central heating. At the opening, Ambassador stressed that the home was an excellent example of inter-ethnic cooperation and inter-religious tolerance. The project is the most recent illustration of close cooperation with the Muslim community in the area. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

#### LOCAL LEADERSHIP FOSTERS RECONCILIATION

12. In attendance with Ambassador were Mufti Sevko Omerbasic, Head of Zagreb Islamic Community Mirsad Srebrenikovic, local Imam Azim Durmic, as well as the deputy prefect of Karlovac County and local mayor. National press covered the visit to the home. In his comments, the Ambassador stressed the importance of the home's mission of interethnic cooperation, diversity and religious tolerance. The community is ethnically-mixed with a sizeable Muslim population. The area has been spared post-war inter-ethnic incidents, led in part by Imam Durmic's commitment to reconciliation and extension beyond his role of a religious leader to that of community leader. In Vojnic municipality, ethnic Serbs comprise 50% of the population followed by 37% Bosniaks.

13. Prior to the war, many residents worked across the border near Velika Kladusa at the Agrocomerc state-owned food processing company. Now, however, Cetingrad Mayor Nikola Paulic explained, unemployment rate is around 95 percent in his town, and is one of the most pronounced problems in the county. Unclear land ownership and problematic privatizations have contributed to the lack of investment. Due to lack of jobs, most young people have moved away, leaving predominately the elderly. The county is now installing computers in the schools to improve students' technical skills and build a more

competitive work force.

#### A HOME FOR ALL ETHNICITIES

¶4. The home currently offers a day facility for 40-45 elderly residents from the surrounding three municipalities (Cetingrad, Vojnic and Topusko) on a rotating basis. It includes a medical unit and will soon provide residential space for those who are unable to care for themselves. Imam Durmic and 15 others deliver hot meals to more than 270 shut-ins in 28 villages, the majority of whom are over 70 and alone. In addition, staff provide other assistance such as cleaning, chopping wood, transport to medical appointments, etc. Durmic, in cooperation with Caritas, secured funds for the reconstruction from various donors including the governments of Switzerland, Germany, and Iran. Post's Refugee Fund purchased a kitchen stove and washing machine; USAID funded the heating system. Karlovac County and the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare provided additional funding. Lack of operating funds from the GOC until now has prevented use of the facility for residential purposes. Mufti Oberbasic explained that their goals in operating the home were to care for the elderly Muslim residents, employ members of the local community, and stimulate investment in areas with a Muslim population.

#### GOOD RELATIONS CONTINUE WITH MUSLIM COMMUNITY

¶5. Post's collaboration in constructing the senior's home continues its strong ongoing

relationship with the Bosniak community in the region. Post began working with the community in 2002 when the Embassy began advocating both formally and informally for the GOC to grant citizenship to ethnic Bosniaks--largely members of the Muslim faith-- from the Maljevac area who were denied citizenship for more than a decade. Advocacy included direct financial support to the Muslim community for organizing their legal effort. In 2003 PRM funds provided for office equipment to the Islamic Community Center to facilitate citizenship applications. In May 2005, the GOC granted citizenship to members of the community. That same year, Post sent Imam Durmic on an International Visitors program focused on the role of minorities in public policy. Also, EUCOM and USAID provided funds in 2003 and 2004 for refurbishment of the nearby Maljevac elementary school. EUCOM funded construction materials and U.S. and Croatian engineers rebuilt the school and constructed a recreational area, playground, picnic benches and spectator stands; and later USAID provided kitchen equipment. The school has become a community gathering point and evidence of USG commitment to the area.

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